

Last week, I led a bipartisan letter with Senator ROMNEY, Republican of Utah, and 13 other Senators saying to the FDA to do three things: finish the review of e-cigarettes immediately; reject the applications for e-cigarettes, especially kid-friendly flavors; and No. 3, clear the market of all unapproved e-cigarettes.

Last month, when the Senate approved Dr. Califf, I made it clear that I wanted to treat this matter as an urgent requirement and to clear the backlog. Congress has now given him every tool he needs. Today marks 1 month of his tenure as Commissioner. Will he keep his word to me and so many others to protect kids from a lifetime of addiction? It is time for FDA to do its job and protect America's kids from Big Tobacco and their candy-flavored, sickness-causing e-cigarettes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The Republican whip.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, Friday marked the first anniversary of the so-called American Rescue Plan, which is the Democrats' partisan \$1.9 trillion spending spree. Fittingly, the anniversary arrived just 1 day after the release of February's inflation numbers which marked the worst inflation since January of 1982.

Why do I say "fittingly"?

Well, because the anniversary of the American Rescue Plan is basically the anniversary of our inflation crisis. While it is true that supply chain issues and the reopening of economies after COVID shutdowns created certain inflationary pressures, a big part of the reason for our current inflation crisis is Democrats' decision to pass the American Rescue Plan last March.

The definition of inflation is too many dollars chasing too few goods and services, and that is exactly the situation Democrats helped create with their so-called American Rescue Plan. Democrats came into office mere weeks after Congress had passed a fifth—fifth—bipartisan COVID relief bill totaling almost \$1 trillion and meeting, essentially, all current pressing COVID needs. Our economy was well on its way to a healthy recovery, and the majority of States had the money they needed to deal with the pandemic. In short, it was abundantly clear that we were not in immediate need of trillions more in government spending.

But that didn't stop Democrats. Now that they were in charge, they were eager to take advantage of the COVID crisis to begin implementing their Big Government vision. So in the name of COVID relief, they pushed through a massive partisan \$1.9 trillion spending piece of legislation filled with unnecessary spending and handouts to Democratic interest groups. Less than 9 percent of that \$1.9 trillion spending bill was earmarked for actually combating COVID. The rest went to priorities like a \$350 billion slush fund for States, a bailout for union pensions, rental as-

sistance far in excess of anything that was needed, and the list goes on.

Despite being billed as essential COVID relief, a substantial portion of the money appropriated will not be spent until 2022 or later; and despite the pressing need for workers to fill the millions of available job openings, Democrats created incentives for Americans to stay on unemployment instead of returning to work by extending enhanced unemployment benefits until September of 2021, long after they were likely to be needed. So the end result of all this was entirely predictable.

Democrats flooded the economy with unnecessary government money, and the economy overheated as a result. And you don't have to take my word for it. Here is what Steve Rattner, who served in the Obama administration, had to say in November:

The original sin was the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, passed in March. The bill—almost completely unfunded—sought to counter the effects of the COVID pandemic by focusing on demand-side stimulus rather than on investment. That has contributed materially to today's inflation levels.

Let me repeat that. This, according to Steve Rattner, who worked in the Obama administration, about inflation—talked about the legislation passed last year by the Democrats. He said that this "has contributed materially to today's inflation levels."

Or, as another former Obama administration member put it:

The United States has had much more inflation than almost any other advanced economy in the world.

That was Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University and former Obama administration economic adviser.

He went on to say:

The difference comes because the United States stimulus is in a category of its own.

That, again, from another former Obama administration economist, Jason Furman.

Inflation started to rise almost as soon as the ink was dry on the American Rescue Plan, and it just keeps rising. February's 7.9 percent inflation marks the worst inflation since January of 1982—January of 1982—40 years ago.

And Americans are struggling. Just going to the grocery store is taking up a larger and larger portion of the American paycheck. Ground beef is up 13 percent; eggs are up 11 percent; citrus fruits are up 16 percent; chicken is up 13 percent; milk, up 11 percent; bacon and related products are up 18 percent; and on and on and on.

In fact, one American quoted in the New York Times noted that bacon is now as expensive as filet mignon used to be. Ordinary goods are starting to feel like luxury objects as more and more families struggle to afford basic grocery items.

A Washington Post columnist noted that a number of the price increases recorded for February were the highest annual increases ever recorded for

those items, including an 8.4-percent increase in the price of baby food and an 11-percent increase in the cost of lunch meat.

In a speech to House Democrats last week, the President suggested that he was "sick of" people saying that Democrats' reckless spending had helped cause our inflation crisis. This is what the President said last week—President Biden:

[T]he American people think the reason for inflation is the government is spending more money. Simply not true.

Well, there are a lot of economists who would disagree with him, including the two Democratic economists I have already quoted. And President Biden himself actually admitted in November that his stimulus checks helped increase the demand fueling inflation. I am sorry that President Biden is sick of having people point this out.

But you know who else is sick and tired of things? The American people. They are sick and tired of facing massive price increases everywhere they look. They are sick of increasingly having to live paycheck to paycheck as they wonder just how much further their grocery prices are going to go up. They are sick of wondering if they will be able to pay all of next month's bills.

And whether President Biden likes it or not, his so-called American Rescue Plan is responsible for a substantial part of the economic distress that Americans are now experiencing. And while President Biden may be sick of it, we need to keep talking about this because the President is still—still—trying to double down on the spending strategy that helped create this inflation crisis in the first place. Just 2 weeks ago in the State of the Union Address, the President discussed inflation and outlined his hopes for massive new amounts of government spending, spending that would unquestionably take an already bad inflation situation and make it even worse.

It is nice that the President and congressional Democrats are now talking about our inflation crisis, but it would be even nicer if they would realize that it was their spending that helped trigger this crisis in the first place; otherwise, we will continue to see Democrats push for ever bigger increases in government spending with correspondingly devastating price increases for American families.

The American Rescue Plan was a bad deal for Americans. Let's hope that Democrats do not have the chance to double down on this legislation and make our current inflation crisis even worse.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Ms. ERNST pertaining to the introduction of S. 3836 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. ERNST. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, last week, the Senate passed a \$1.5 trillion funding bill that the Democratic majority insisted was full of must-pass, got-to-have-it, can't-live-without-it provisions that the American people were demanding. Unfortunately, the reality of what made it into that bill doesn't match the fantasy my Democratic colleagues conjured up for the cameras.

In reality, this \$1.5 trillion package was another spending spree. It was complete with 4,400 earmarks—4,400 earmarks. Now, these earmarks don't have any Federal nexus. They are not connected to your military post or your Federal highway. These are things for shopping centers and parks and city renovations and—you name it—pet projects. So that is not government funding; that is a Big Government windfall that the American people simply can't afford.

As we all know, an inability to pay for these programs has never stopped this Democratic majority from shoving through their radical and increasingly destructive agenda. By their own admission, the out-of-control spending habits have contributed to decades-high inflation. Imagine that.

What we know is that, in Tennessee, I am talking to people every day. They can't afford food and gas and to pay all of their monthly expenses, but for some reason, my Democratic colleagues think taxpayers will be happy to pay for their pet projects back home—all 4,400 of them. You just can't make this stuff up.

The American people are really confused by this. They are also completely appalled by Joe Biden's refusal to secure the border, his refusal to invest in American energy independence, and his willingness to keep our economy entangled with the Chinese Communist Party. Every one of these points worries them. Yet what really scares them is the President's refusal to discuss any of it: Just don't talk about it. It will go away. Inflation, that is transitory. If gas is too expensive, go buy yourself an electric vehicle. This is just so disrespectful of hard-working men and women.

Joe Biden has caused a lot more problems than he solved during the

first year of his Presidency, and his constant pivots away from life-or-death problems have destroyed what little trust the American people had left in his ability to get the job done.

They like to think that the President cares about what happens to them—the American people, the citizens—but they haven't seen any evidence to suggest that he is thinking about them.

Last week, I was up on the Plateau in Tennessee, talking to Tennesseans about what is going on here in the Senate. Most of what they tell me boils down to one simple truth: From where they are sitting and the news they are watching and the papers they are reading, it is clear that the Democrats have a very aggressive agenda, but they have no vision for the future of this country. They feel like what the Democrats want is control over their daily life, not a vision of a country filled with open doors and opportunity for all. They are not seeing that out of this agenda.

Why, they ask me, do their elected representatives take such drastic measures to do things that make their lives harder, that make their situations worse? They can't figure it out.

Since Joe Biden and the Democrats took control, inflation has skyrocketed. We have become energy dependent on Russia. We have abandoned not one, but two embassies. We high-tailed it out of there. Two embassies, cut and run. Our Border Patrol, they are apprehending known terrorists and MS-13 gang members who are coming into this country. If they are apprehending them, we are getting some but not all. And now we are hearing about Russia going out, going to Iran, saying: Let me have your soldiers for hire; let me have your proxies, the Wagner Group, which is closely aligned with Vladimir Putin.

And all the time, Tennesseans are saying: Well, what about these terrorists trying to come over the southern border? Are they mercenaries? Are they soldiers for hire?

People are raising these issues. And this is all part of what the Democrats have accomplished this year.

The American people tolerate quite a bit from their government, but one thing they won't accept is a President who shrugs his shoulders, runs from the podium, who claims to be a victim of circumstance, who is weak-kneed and refuses to lead.

Even former Obama White House officials have come forward begging the Biden administration to stop the spin, face reality, show some leadership, deal with the situation. This has to be getting embarrassing, even for them.

The American people have spent the past year watching Joe Biden abandon the policies that kept the country from collapsing under the weight of the pandemic. And what has he replaced those policies with? Mandates, lockdowns that have made the country poorer, increased regulation that has stopped oil and gas exploration, increased regula-

tion that is making it tougher on manufacturers, a push for higher taxes—that is what they are doing. And do you know what? It makes people less hopeful. It makes people less free. It gives people fewer options.

See, that is what they are seeing. The Democratic agenda is all about government control of your life. It is an agenda; it is not a vision for this country, for our children, for our grandchildren that is rooted in opportunity for all.

There is only one way to undo this damage and to stop this train that this administration is pushing as hard as they can toward socialism. The President needs to stop the spin. He needs to start listening to what people are saying, people across the country.

Here is the thing: They don't want this President to fail. They don't want him to fail. They don't want this country to fail, so it means that the President is going to have to stop bowing to all of this environmentalism as a religion and climate change as a god. They need to stop that.

They need to see, yes, we need to have an Operation Warp Speed, to be energy independent, pull everybody together—Federal Agencies, the private sector.

We are the United States of America, and if we had the desire, we could do this. We could be energy independent once again. We could stand strong. We could stand strong against Russia, against Iran, against China and the Chinese Communist Party.

What that is going to require is an administration and a Democratic Party that has a vision for the greatness and goodness of this country.

I think that what we have to do is we have to lead the way in saying it is time to show respect for the American people, to listen to what they are telling us, and to make certain that we stand for this country, standing strong for future generations.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be able to complete my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENERGY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as all of America knows, prices at the gas pump are skyrocketing. Over the weekend, the average gas price in Texas exceeded \$4 a gallon, and we typically have some of the cheapest gasoline in the country. We didn't even cross that line during the great recession of 2008. But we know that gas prices are not the only